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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that the university faculty members assigned extra-curricular duties with forensics have been denied proper evaluation procedures, this paper argues for the need to apply professional evaluation standards to forensics directors. It proposes four separate components to be considered in developing such standards: (1) professional qualifications, (2) academic excellence, (3) administrative ability, and (4) interpersonal and instructional qualities. (FL)

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APPLYING PROFESSIONAL EVALUATION STANDARDS TO FORENSICS DIRECTORS

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The role of the forensics director as a professional educator has been largely ignored in recent argumentation and forensics literature. It has been almost seven years since the National Developmental Conference on Forensics concluded that a serious obstacle in evaluating forensics directors is the absence of acceptable criteria for measuring excellence in forensics.[1] This void in the literature remains today as there has been little attempt to determine standards by which faculty committees, department chairpersons, or college deans can judge the ability of their forensics directors.

The purpose of this paper is to indicate the need for applying professional evaluation standards to forensics directors. Several potential standards will be examined for possible application.

Most institutions on the university level require or encourage some form of faculty evaluation program. In the past, forms used for such evaluations have evolved according to the demands of the period and the philosophy of the institution.

In this era of increased professional specialization and diverse program offerings, additional fine tuning of the faculty evaluation process seems appropriate. Many faculty members find their job descriptions now heavily emphasizing

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the direction of extra-curricular activities such as radio stations, theater, or forensics. This emphasis is especially true in the area of forensics where hiring and promotional decisions are possibly influenced more by the individual's coaching background than any actual teaching experience. Yet, traditional approaches to faculty evaluation do not always encompass the unique demands required of the forensics coach. This is particularly likely to occur with administration officials or department chairpersons who lack previous exposure to the forensics world.

The most likely consequence of these current approaches is to create an artifical standard by which to judge the strength of an individual forensics program. As Glen Mills suggests, an artificial criterion can be formed that emphasizes total numbers of students involved in a particular program, the amount of victories secured, or even the percentage of wins over losses.[2]

What is needed is an expansion of faculty evaluation proceedure into the extra-curricular activity of forensics. The teacher who benefits from peer evaluation of classroom performance should have that same input in an evaluation of coaching effectiveness. The National Developmental Conference on Forensics concurred in suggesting that faculty involved in the forensics programs should be giver credit for and then

evaluated in terms of the specific requirements of their jobs.[3] The benefits to this alternative process lie in a more comprehensive evaluation for an educator assigned to extra-curricular duties.

The proposed evaluation for a forensics director incorporates four separate components: professional qualifications, academic excellence, administrative ability, and interpersonal/instructional qualities. These four components are characteristic of the concerns about professional preparation reported by the Project Delphi report of the National Developmental Conference on Forensics.[4] Each component is of unique importance to both the educational and administrative support for forensics. Each area can be further divided to insure effective measurement during the actual evaluation process.

Professional Qualifications

Teachers charged with the responsibility to direct the forensics program also assume a professional obligation. As Don Faules, Richard Rieke, and Jack Rhodes lamented, the minimum requirement to direct forensics is often only the willingness to do so when asked by a principal or department chairperson.[5] While such willingness is commendable, a director's professional qualifications should be considered in the initial hiring process and continually subject to

further review.

There are different criteria available to judge the professional qualifications of a forensics director. Items to be considered could include: knowledge of debate theory, knowledge of individual events, membership in professional organizations, published research, and perceptions by colleagues. The emphasis with this set of criteria is placed on knowledge and professional participation. Attempts are made to avoid possibly misleading criteria such as the number of trophies in the squad room. The factors of knowledge and participation allows an evaluation to determine the extent of understanding of relevant issues by a particular director while also measuring the professional committment to the field of forensics.

Academic Excellence

The rigors and demands of many forensics programs force directors to spend a great deal of time traveling. While making a significant contribution to forensics is important, such benefits should not be at the expense of one's classroom obligations. Strong consideration should be given to how effectively a forensics director handles his/her classroom duties. Factors for consideration in this area include: the accessability the director has to non-forensic students, how the director adjusts to absences caused by forensic obligations,

and how well the director commands the respect of non-forensics students. By intertwining these areas with other student evaluation criterion, an indication is given of what effect, if any, forensics duties have on teaching effectiveness.

Administrative Ability

As budgets and squad size have increased in recent years, so has the administration function of forensics directors. The ability to make financial, scheduling, and personnel decisions becomes critical in maintaining a functional program.

The possible evaluation criteria in this area are many. An evaluation of the administration function would include examining the director in terms of: effective program publicity, proper supervision of the budget, supervision of graduate assistants, encouraging student participation, providing sufficent on campus events, sponsoring/attending tournaments, and developing an educational perspective. The emphasis is not placed in any one area, bot does consider the different responsibilities inherent with the position.

Interpersonal/Instructional Qualities

On the average, the forensics director has an unusually high contact time with students when factors such as travel and coaching sessions are included. Concern is given in this

component to the relationship that exists between the director and the student. The evaluation attempts to measure the director's ability to maintain an educational perspective with the students while also developing a constructive interpersonal relationship.

Questions that this area of evaluation would consider include: a director's respect for student time, concern with student pressure, decision-making ability, accessability to all squad members, nature of instructive comments, and fairness in dictating policy. This segment of the evaluation could aid the director in becoming aware of previously unknown concerns.

The focus of this paper has been to suggest that the university faculty members assigned extra-curricular duties with forensics have been denied peer evaluation procedures. An approach to effective evaluation of forensics directors was constructed involving the components of academic excellence, professional qualifications, administrative ability, and interpersonal/instructional qualities.

Actual application and utilization of this evaluation approach requires input from both students and faculty. The actual format and emphasis given each criteria is not a concern in this paper. What is important is that classroom students, teams members, and relevant faculty members all have input into evaluation process.

If the evaluation process is considered important enough to be an integral part of so many academic departments, then that same process should be extended to supervision of extra-curricular activities. The criteria suggested in this paper remains flexible to allow specific leeway in the actual application. Additional consideration of excellence in extra-curricular duties assures a comprehensive evaluation that is important to the personal and professional growth of the educator. It is hoped that the evaluation criteria outlined in this paper will help in achieving such growth.

Endnotes

1. McBath, James H., ed. Forensics as Communication. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1975. page 145.

2. Glen E. Mills, "Audiences and Tournaments: Two Forms of Overemphasis," The Speech Teacher, IX (March, 1960) page 98.

3. McBath, p. 145

4. McBath, p. 76

5. Faules, Don & Rieke, Richard & Rhodes, Jack, Directing Forensics:Contest and Debate Speaking. Denver, Colorado: Morton Publishing Company, 1978 page 70.